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The Role of Education in Development in an
Indigenous Mexican Community:
Indigenous Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the role of formal education in development for indigenous peoples. To shed light on the complex relationship between education and development, it presents an in-depth exploration of the experiences, concerns and aspirations of members of one indigenous Mexican community concerning the issues of identity, development and schooling. It investigates how the people of this location, a Zapoteco village in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, see development for their community, and how formal education could best contribute to the achievement of these aspirations. Education is considered within the context of different social processes taking place in the community.

Attention is focused on the perspectives of indigenous parents and young people, in accordance with a view of development which recognises the expertise of local people in analysing their situation, and respects their opinions and ideas as paramount to achieving appropriate development. Data from interviews with community members is analysed to reveal a number of themes running through respondents' opinions on culture, identity and development, and the interaction of formal education with these. Their ideas concerning education and cultural autonomy are considered in the light of educational and cultural theories sustained by research, and an analysis of the potential of formal education to contribute to the achievement of expressed development goals is presented.

Development for most Tabaeños consisted on the one hand of cultural continuity, in terms of traditional livelihoods, forms of social organisation and language, and on the other of the acquisition of skills, knowledge and institutions that will allow for the economic, social and cultural development of the community and its individuals. Research and the experiences of indigenous communities elsewhere in the world suggest that education has the potential to support community development in both of these aspects. Tabaeños are beginning to take a more active role in formal education, and the existence of a solid and autochthonous foundation for participation and locally controlled development in the community offers grounds for cautious optimism regarding its ability to continue to define and achieve both the education and the development talked of by community members.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANPIBAC	<i>Alianza Nacional de Profesionales Indígenas Bilingües</i> National Alliance of Bilingual Indigenous Professionals
CBTa	<i>Centro de Bachillerato para Técnicas Agropecuarias</i> Agricultural Technical High School
CNPI	<i>Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas</i> National Council of Indigenous Peoples
DEI	<i>Departamento de Educación Indígena</i> Department of Indigenous Education (in the state of Oaxaca)
DGEI	<i>Dirección General de Educación Indígena</i> General Directorate of Indigenous Education
EZLN	<i>Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional</i> Zapatista National Liberation Army
IEEPO	<i>Instituto Estatal de Educación Pública de Oaxaca</i> Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INI	<i>Instituto Nacional Indigenista</i> National Indigenist Institute
L1	home language or first language
L2	second language
RLS	reversing language shift
SEP	<i>Secretaría de Educación Pública</i> Secretariat of Public Education
SJT	San Juan Tabaá

GLOSSARY

<i>aguardiente</i>	a locally brewed alcoholic spirit, made from sugar cane
<i>alcalde</i>	the person responsible for justice and dispute resolution
<i>bachillerato</i>	a high school, usually one that offers a technical course of studies
<i>barrio</i>	neighbourhood, a group of families in the village who hold land communally
<i>cabecera municipal</i>	municipal capital
<i>cacique</i>	a local despot, a person who holds political power in a community and abuses it to further his own interests, usually a large land-owner who rents plots to peasant farmers (usually historical)
<i>cargo</i>	an office or position of great responsibility in the community, generally elected by popular vote, e.g. president, <i>síndico</i> , <i>alcalde</i> , president of the church
<i>ciudadano</i>	literally "citizen," used in Tabaá to refer to those who take part in the community administrative system of assemblies and services, i.e. men between 17 and 60 who are not students
<i>fiesta</i>	a religious festival
<i>gozona</i>	see <i>guelaguetza</i>
<i>guelaguetza</i>	a loosely reciprocal system of mutual help among households, used when extra labour or resources are needed, e.g. weddings, harvest
<i>indígena</i>	indigenous, an indigenous person
<i>indio</i>	"Indian," term used to describe indigenous Mexicans in previous centuries, now considered derogatory
<i>jarabe</i>	a traditional dance in the Sierra Norte, danced in couples to brass band music
<i>mestizo</i>	of mixed Indian and European blood; the majority of the Mexican population belongs to this group
<i>municipio</i>	municipality, similar to a county
<i>Oaxaqueño/a</i>	a person from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca

<i>preparatoria</i>	a high school that offers a course preparing students for entry into university
<i>servicio</i>	an unpaid and often obligatory position of responsibility in the community, usually appointed by the municipal authority, e.g. committee member, village security
<i>sierra</i>	mountain range
<i>Sierra Norte</i>	one of the seven regions into which the state of Oaxaca is divided, and the location of the community studied
<i>síndico</i> affairs	the person responsible for attending to internal community affairs
<i>Tabaeño/a</i>	a person from Tabaá; the adjectival form of Tabaá, e.g. Tabaeño culture
<i>tequio</i>	obligatory and unpaid communal work on community projects, performed by <i>ciudadanos</i> and some women whenever required by the village authorities
<i>usos y costumbres</i>	“practices and customs,” traditional forms of political and social organisation, now legally recognised
<i>Zapoteco</i>	one of 62 indigenous ethnic groups in Mexico, and that to which members of the community studied belong; the language family of this ethnic group